

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 06126 151236Z

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ONY-00 /011 W
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R 131617Z SEP 76
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9548

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 6126

STADIS//////////

FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SY
SUBJECT: SYRIAN JEWS

REF: STATE 218547

1. AS REPORTED DAMASCUS 5619, RABBI HERSHBERG APPARENTLY HAD NO BASIS FOR HIS COMMENTS IN JERUSALEM ABOUT LIBERALIZATION OF SYRIAN EMIGRATION POLICIES FOR SYRIAN JEWS. HIS STATEMENTS MAY ONLY HAVE FUELED GROUNDLESS HOPES ON THE PART OF THOSE WHO HAD BEEN WAITING MANY YEARS FOR FAMILY REUNIFICATION.

2. I AM INTRIGUED, HOWEVER, BY THE POSSIBILITY THAT HIAS MIGHT JUST HAVE AN ARGUMENT IN TERMS OF ITS MANDATE WHICH THE SYRIANS COULD ACCEPT AS CONSTITUTING THE "GUARANTEES" TO WHICH ASAD HAS REFERRED IN THE PAST.

3. AS A FIRST STEP, I RECOMMEND THAT HIAS CONTACT SYRIAN AMBASSADOR KABBANI TO DISCUSS THEIR APPROACH. WHEN LAST IN WASHINGTON IN LATE JULY, I HEARD IN NEA/ARN THAT KABBANI ON HIS OWN INITIATIVE EITHER WAS PLANNING OR HAD ALREADY SUBMITTED A RECOMMENDATION TO DAMASCUS THAT, AS A HUMANITARIAN GESTURE, ELDERLY SYRIAN JEWS WHO WERE RELATIVES OF AMERICAN CITIZENS BE PERMITTED TO DEPART SYRIA TO SETTLE WITH THEIR FAMILIES IN THE U.S. I WAS UNABLE TO CONTACT

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KABBANI DURING MY OWN VISIT BUT IF HE DID CARRY THROUGH

WITH THIS IDEA (AND NO SYRIAN HAS SPOKEN TO ME ABOUT IT) IT
COULD SERVE AS A POSSIBLY USEFUL PLATFORM FOR HIAS TO BUILD
UPON. SUCH DISCUSSIONS COULD IN ANY EVENT HELP HIAS
DETERMINE THE UTILITY OF ITS SENDING A DELEGATION TO
DAMASCUS LATER THIS YEAR. I FEEL STRONGLY THAT ANY SUCH
VISIT SHOULD BE CAREFULLY AND QUIETLY PREPARED IF THERE
ARE TO BE POSITIVE RESULTS. FROM MY OWN PAST CONTACTS WITH
HIAS REPS, I KNOW THEY WOULD SHARE THAT VIEW.

4. ACTION REQUESTED: ADVISE ABOUT STATUS OF KABBANI'S
REPORTED INITIATIVE AND WHETHER DEPARTMENT WILL RECOMMEND
HIAS CONTACT HIM. ANSWERS TO BOTH QUESTIONS WILL HELP ME
DETERMINE BEST COURSE TO FOLLOW HERE.
MURPHY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLICIES, REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT, JEWS, EMIGRANTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: saccheem
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976DAMASC06126
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760347-1352
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760968/aaaacfww.tel
Line Count: 75
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: 76 STATE 218547
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: saccheem
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 JUN 2004 by ElyME>; APPROVED <07 OCT 2004 by saccheem>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SYRIAN JEWS
TAGS: PINT, SY
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006